Review

Reviewed Work(s): Adventure Time and Philosophy: The Handbook for Heroes by Nicholas Michaud

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Michaud, Nicholas, ed. *Adventure Time and Philosophy: The Handbook for Heroes.* Open Court Publishing Company, 2015. 308 pp. Softcover. ISBN 978-0-8126-9858-9. $19.95.

Adventure Time and Philosophy: The Handbook for Heroes, edited by Nicholas Michaud, is one of the latest entries in the *Popular Culture and Philosophy* series from Open Court Publishing, and consists of a hefty twenty-six articles divided into five sections. Fans of *Adventure Time* are sure to enjoy the in-depth discussion of protagonists Jake the Dog and Finn the Human, as well as essays on supporting characters like the Ice King, Princess Bubblegum, and Beemo, but those without prior intimate knowledge of the show may be left befuddled. The essays are somewhat informally written for the sake of readability, and in explaining the philosophical concepts without being obtuse, establish a lighthearted tone for the collection that should entice many philosophers and academics. That said, the book's introduction fails to address the themes or content beyond a cursory level, and, perhaps more problematically, the majority of the articles lack proper in-text citations.

The first section, "Nasty, Brutish, and Sweet," serves as an overview to the television series by offering considerations of different characters' ideologies, such as the differences between the role of magic and the role of science according to Finn in John V. Karavitis's "The Finn-losophy of *Adventure Time*." By exploring the dichotomy between Finn's preference for, and Princess Bubblegum's reliance on, science throughout the series, Karavitis's article provides a helpful introduction for those unfamiliar with the show while offering fresh insight into the construction of two of its most popular protagonists. The second section, "Glob Said the Word and It Was 'Cabbage!'" feels more disparate thematically, featuring essays on different representations of free will in *Adventure Time* (Greg Littman's "Ice King Blues" and Liam Miller's "The Owl and the One-Armed Boy"), along with an essay on representations of God in the fictional land of Ooo ("Oh God, Where the Glob Art Thou?" by Poom Namvol).

The third section, "Life Is But a Croak Dream," features essays on intangible concepts like play, time, and perceptions of reality, utilizing *Adventure Time* as a vehicle for working through philosophical concepts as well as examining their positions within the show. Michael J. Muniz's "The Paradox of Horror and the Ocean of Fear" exemplifies this section's approach by arguing that *Adventure Time*'s narrative can teach viewers to balance emotion with personal beliefs. "What Are You?" the fourth section, is centered on questioning notions of life and humanity. Two particularly strong pieces focus on the character Beemo, a Game Boy-like being that lives with Finn and Jake. David Degginger argues in his essay "When My GameBoy Became Self-Aware" that, contrary to his/her outward appearance, Beemo is to be considered a human,

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challenging the common notion that Beemo is simply a semi-intelligent handheld electronic. Christopher Ketcham counters this argument by putting Beemo through a version of the Turing Test, showing that Beemo's intelligence is not sufficient to evoke empathy and likening Beemo instead to a toy.

Out of the five sections, the fifth feels the most cohesive and thematically linked, as the last section, "For Righteous Eyes Only," grapples with different notions of heroism and their representations within *Adventure Time*—most specifically with the protagonist Finn the Human and the handbook of heroes, the Enchiridion. Scott Forest Aikin explores whether Finn's heroic actions are righteous in "Finn's No Hero!" by cross-examining the Stoic philosopher Epictetus' handbook of virtues against Finn's adventures, ultimately finding Finn to be a flawed hero. This article pairs nicely with Rakel Blöndal Sveinsdóttir's "I Want to Be Your Hero, Maybe!" Through the lens of virtue ethics, Sveinsdóttir questions Finn's heroism and character, ultimately finding Finn's desire to be a hero to be something toward which readers, or viewers of the show, should also aspire. The rest of the essays offer further considerations of Finn and his relationship to the Enchiridion throughout the series, serving as an effective conclusion to the collection by ending on an extended analysis of Finn.

At twenty-six articles, the edited collection spans a vast breadth of approaches and perspectives on the show (although six of the authors, including the editor, have two articles featured in the collection). Multiple essays provide foils to each other, as in the case of "Should Simon Have Saved Marceline?" by Matthew Montoya and "When I Don't Remember You" by Nicholas Michaud in sections one and four respectively. The first article, "Should Simon Have Saved Marceline?" breaks down the origin story of how Simon Petrokov became the Ice King and considers different choices the Ice King could have potentially made in order to determine whether his choice to save another character, Marceline, by losing his humanity was morally right. By comparison, "When I Don't Remember You" examines the Ice King in the aftermath of this monumental decision, and whether Simon Petrikov truly died when he became the Ice King, as opposed to the generally accepted notion that they are the same person.

The book's brief introduction misses the opportunity to explain the collection, making it difficult to follow the theme of each section or the links between the essays within a section, or to understand and contextualize the atypical essay presentations within the collection as a whole. For example, each essay begins with a creatively written recap, summary, or spin of a short framing scene from *Adventure Time*, ranging from a few lines to a full page in length, followed by the rest of the article's content. Beyond the creative framing narrative for each essay, a few essays within the collection stray from conventional expectations, using written dialog in a script between characters

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(with varying degrees of success) rather than the standard explication to present arguments. For example, Christopher Ketcham's "Ooo, Who's Dreaming?" presents an intriguing discussion of reality, sexuality, and dreams through the voices of six imagined storyboard writers creating an episode of *Adventure Time*, yet this dialogic presentation of the material feels disjointed and obfuscated by the humorous asides. More successful is Mary Green and Ronald S. Green's use of the dialog effect in their article "What's Time Anyhoo?" which offers a critical engagement with notions of time through the voice of Jake the Dog and an all-powerful being named Prismo. Narrowing the conversation down to only a few voices causes the discussion to feel more developed, yet the presentation of the material through the voices and dialog of these two characters from the show itself is jarring at first.

Perhaps the most surprising problem with this collection, however, is the lack of in-text citations for the different philosophical theorists utilized and for the episodes mentioned in each article. While a references section is included at the end of *Adventure Time and Philosophy*, only a few essays utilize in-text citations at all, let alone consistently. Citing sources and episodes throughout the collection would have benefited readers of all kinds, particularly those unfamiliar with *Adventure Time* or with the primary philosophical concepts. Though the concepts are typically explained in detail throughout each article, as in the case of Ben Gale and Adam Barkman's lucid discussion of Thomas Hobbes's notion of the "state of nature" and power structures in "Who Governs Ooo?" the collection's lack of citations may make it difficult for general readers to engage fully with the content.

As one of the first critical engagements with *Adventure Time*, the collection's wide coverage of topics should be commended, as fans of the television show will undoubtedly find the articles appealing. Similarly, *Adventure Time and Philosophy*'s atypical approaches are refreshing amid the formulaic standardization of most academic articles, yet the execution of these different approaches may not be accessible to all readers. Due to the philosophical focus of the collection, most of the essays raise more questions than they answer, positioning Michaud's collection as a jumping-off point for future critical analyses of *Adventure Time*. This collection will also appeal to readers of the *Popular Culture and Philosophy* series, but the general academic public may not find the specialized topic appealing enough to purchase the book.

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